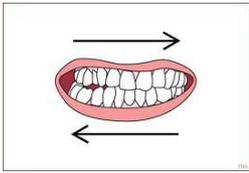


Do you grind your teeth?

Bruxism is an excessive clenching or grinding of the teeth that is not a part of normal chewing movements. In adults and children bruxism may occur during the day or at night and is not a normal healthy action of the jaw. Some minimal night grinding is common and acceptable, but if it becomes more excessive it requires treatment to prevent the consequences.

In some instances the person who has the habit is not aware of it. Often it is the partner or parent who hears the grinding sound during the night while the person is asleep.



What causes it?

The causes of bruxism is still being studied but we believe that a combination of physical and physiological factors contribute to it.

Bruxism is commonly triggered by a stressful event or stage of life. Once the habit is established it may come into play when a person is tired or stressed. In some instances a poor bite, caused by problems such as parts of the teeth or fillings being too high can start the habit. Studies have shown that night bruxism is a type of sleep disorder.

Signs and Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of bruxism vary according to the nature, frequency, duration and strength of the excessive clenching and grinding. They may include:

- Pain in the teeth and sensitivity to heat and cold
- Flattened and worn tooth surfaces which may reveal the underlying yellow dentine layer.
- Broken fillings or chipped/cracked teeth
- Jaw joint pain and disorders
- Earache and hearing problems
- Loose teeth with possible damage to the supporting gums and sockets
- Some forms of headache and neck-ache due to muscle fatigue
- Enlarged jaw muscles due to overuse

Treatment

Sometimes if the condition has been related to stress, it usually disappears on its own accord once a person has adjusted to a situation. However, if bruxing is an established pattern it is advisable to have it investigated and treated. There are a number of techniques available in the treatment of bruxism.

Adjustments

Initially an occlusal examination will be conducted which determines any problems with the bite. Ideally the upper and lower teeth should meet together evenly and comfortably. However, if for some reason this does not happen, bruxism can start as the jaws and chewing muscles try to grind the teeth into a position where everything does feel comfortable.

Often the smoothing down of fillings or teeth that are protruding too far is all that is required to rectify the problem.

Splints

Using a splint separates the upper and lower teeth to help protect them from further damage and relieves the soreness in the chewing muscles and jaw joints. The splint is light and fits over the top teeth. It is usually worn at night while sleeping only. The biting surface of the splint is custom made so that the opposing teeth can slide over it easily unable to lock in anywhere. It also acts like a cushion between the teeth to prevent further wear of the tooth surfaces.

Physiotherapy and Stress Management

Physiotherapy and massage may be required to relieve muscle spasms and other relaxation techniques can help with handling a stressful situation. This is not usually required once the cause (excessive grinding) is eliminated. Regular exercise, such as walking increases resistance to stress.

Managing grinding is important to reduce the damage that can be caused by grinding. Other treatment may be necessary to repair already damaged teeth. This can involve placing fillings or crowns to damaged teeth. Protecting the teeth and preventing the damage before it even occurs is much more effective. Partial dentures, bridges or implants can replace missing teeth so the loading can be spread. Orthodontic treatment can realign misplaced and crooked teeth which can be a trigger for grinding.

How to proceed with a Splint



Make an appointment with us to have an impression of your upper and lower teeth



Approx 1 week later you will return to us so we can issue you with your splint. We will check it fits well and feels comfortable.

You will be given homecare instructions.



Approx 2 weeks later you will return for an adjustment appointment followed by another adjustment appointment 2 weeks after that.